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ABSTRACT

A picture story about the preparation of a child for school is presented. Topics included are: the early years, the changing process, individual differences, preparing for learning, preparation for reading, learning with others, self-reliance, self-care, sharing, preparation for the future, reading readiness, and creativity. (CK)

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YOUR CHILD-

From Home to School

A Handbook for Parents Whose Child Is Entering School

National Association of Elementary School Principals
National School Public Relations Association
1201 Sixteenth Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

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A Beginning

This is a story with a beginning, but no end.

It's mostly about one child—yours. It's also about his teachers, including you. And it's full of drama, humor, perhaps a few tears, and hopefully a lifetime of learning.

Your child is starting to school, an important time he shares with his playmates and about four million other young children across the country this year. Perhaps he is one of the growing number of youngsters who first come to school as a four- or five-year-old, but most likely he is entering at the first grade or primary level. This is a big step — into a new place all day, new people to play and work with, demands upon the use of time, the opening up of all sorts of ways to satisfy his curiosity — but it isn't his first step toward learning.

That was taken years ago when your child was an infant and just beginning to notice what was around him. You encouraged him to smile and laugh, to talk, to walk, to be curious and adventurous (within limits), to ask questions, find answers, and to share his world with others. In other words, you were his first teacher.

Now, someone else — or several other persons — will begin to share that responsibility with you. That basically is what this little booklet is about, the ways in which parents and the home build together with teachers and the schools a common understanding and concern for very young children.

You started your child on a lifetime of learning. It's time for school to do its part.

The Early Years

At Home

Not so long ago he was a baby, but like one of those rapid-photo images of growing things, your child quickly changed from infant to toddler to the "terrible-two" and on through the pre-school years. Each day was a learning experience that added its part to your child's awareness of himself, his family, and the environment around him.

Most parents haven't formally studied child behavior, but more and more of them are aware of the enormous opportunities they have to influence the learning abilities of their young children. Books, magazines, TV and community programs are spelling out what educational psychologists, until a few years ago, generally confined to their own profession — that the early years in the home are the most important of a person's life.

Your child has depended upon the little things — what you gave him to play with, where you took him, his friendships, the time you spent with him. And one big thing — your encouragement and delight in his growing up. He will continue to need this kind of support as he goes through school.

At School

Just as young children are a special breed because they are young, so teachers and classrooms for the early years of school are special, too.

You may not know exactly who such people as Piaget, Bruner, and Kagan are, but most teachers of young children are learning more and more about these researchers of child behavior and how their theories can apply to the classroom. Perhaps they were introduced to the specialty of early childhood education when they were studying to be teachers; experienced teachers go back to school or take in-service courses to keep themselves professionally up to date.

A parent, for example, may see a child finally tying his shoelaces correctly and think that repetition and increasing coordination of little fingers achieved the success. A teacher with extra training in early childhood education, however, recognizes that

this act involves not only these achievements but also memory, concentration, and an awareness of spatial relationships.

Educators now generally accept the premise that the early years — up to age six — are the most crucial learning years, but they also know that intelligence is not fixed, that stimulation and encouragement can influence children's abilities to think at any age.

While teachers have been receiving special training for young children, many of the "tools" for learning — the materials used for teaching — have changed and improved to accommodate better approaches to learning.

Learning To Change

At Home

Can you remember when you started to school? That was most likely more than 20 years ago, give or take a few years. There were few new buildings then and they probably were crowded; there was one teacher to a classroom of children all about the same age. You were lucky to have a movie projector to use, much less a TV set in the classroom. Other things might have been changing, but the schoolroom was much as it was when your own parents were in school.

You weren't too concerned about interplanetary travel or New Cities, communication satellites or ocean farming, or breakthroughs in medical science and education and environmental quality. These constantly evolving ideas and accomplishments are a way of life for your child, and always will be. This makes it especially important that today's young children acquire a love of learning from the very beginning of their education, which is why the teachers and administrators in your school keep searching for better ways to teach each child.

This doesn't mean that the basic needs of your child have changed. From his parents a child must have affection, recognition, praise, limits, and fairness — the same qualities that every child always has needed for self-confidence and maturity. What is different is that today's parents, more than at any other time, know or can easily find out how to understand and help their children mature.

At School

Schools are changing, too.

On the outside they may be hexagonal or domed, without outside windows, or all windows. Possibly your school is the same kind of red brick building that you knew as a child, but inside it probably is quite different.

If your child is entering at the first grade, you will still see books (more of them, more paperbacks for children, probably less dependence upon workbooks). Children will be learning math by counting — yes — but often with Cuisenaire rods or measurements of sand and water, not in the abstract way that you learned it. Desks may be moved into groups instead of rows; there may be carpeting on the floor and special corners for reading or science or drama. Children may be making their own films or tape recordings, using the new media as well as watching.

If your school is working with the "open classroom" concept, you may never hear a teacher lecture to a whole class. Several teachers will be working with children of varied ages in small groups or one at a time. Older children may be helping younger ones with their studies. Groups of children will be doing a variety of things at the same time (the noise level may disturb adults, but it is natural for children to be active and enthusiastic).

These changes have one purpose in mind — to treat each child as an individual who comes to school with abilities all his own that need to be motivated and challenged to get the most out of learning and life.

Each Child Is Different

At Home

If you have more than one child or the children of friends and relatives close by you can see firsthand the uniqueness of each one of them. It may be easy to persuade one child to put away his toys, and an endless struggle to get a brother or sister to do the same; one eats fast, another slowly; one liked books right away, another wanted to use them for baseballs.

You provide for each child's basic needs. You understand the encouragement and direction that each one must have. But you also recognize and appreciate the differences that set them apart.

At School

Providing for the differing needs of each child is a big motivation behind the changes going on in education.

The more teachers and their trainers learn about child development, the more they are able to understand how an individual child learns best. Some call this "humanizing" the classroom.

It is now generally appreciated, for example, that not every child is ready to read when he enters first grade (some may already be reading, others may not be motivated for many months). This does not disturb teachers; they know that all children will read at their best level if they are not under pressure to live up to artificial standards.

Not all educational programs are alike, nor do all teachers have the same methods — uniqueness is a part of their world, too — but the goal of a good teacher is to help each child reach his fullest potential.

Preparing for Learning

At Home

The parent should be doing more important things than drilling the ABC's into his preschooler. Preparing for the beginning of school is a much larger task than giving him a head start on the academics of learning.

In the classroom he will learn to read and to count, but only at home can the young child learn essential skills that will help him adjust to and get the most out of school from the very first day. From his family a child learns . . .

To be curious, inquiring, not satisfied until he has the right answers to his questions.

To express himself well, not afraid to ask questions, eager to tell what he knows.

To follow through on projects, to not be satisfied until something is finished as best he can do it.

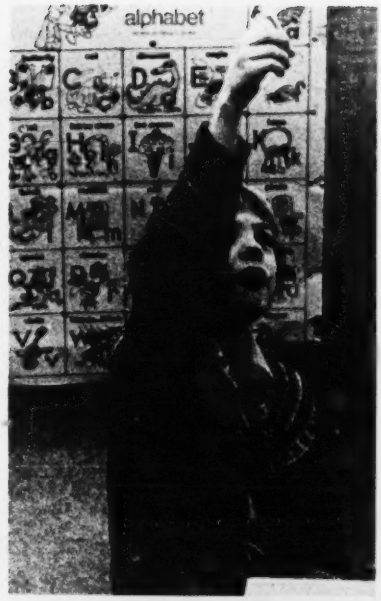
To be interested in the qualities of things (big, little, similar, dissimilar).

To respect the viewpoints and property of others.

Actually the skills that a child enters school with come from the value that his family has placed on helping him gain self-confidence.

At School

Your child will begin his formal education as soon as he enters school, but you may not recognize it as learning. A teacher or a teaching team have much to do before the children in their care



do the reading, spelling, and counting that most of us define as getting an education.

Teachers want to build upon the abilities that each child brings into a new classroom (and this will be true all through his school years), but before the program can be individualized there are some basic skills and attitudes that the school will want to foster in its beginning students. Teachers will prepare children for learning by:

• Helping each child adjust to the structures and the freedoms of the classroom. These will vary even within a school building, but the general goal will be to establish limits that benefit a child working by himself or within a group. The emphasis is not discipline, but self-discipline.

• Evaluating each child's capabilities. This will be done in several ways — testing, observation, using health and other types of records. All kinds of abilities influence a child's readiness for formal learning — even such things as attention span and eye-hand coordination. A teacher also will want to know a child's main interests and enthusiasms, because these may be the clues to helping him want to learn.

• Providing a stimulating environment. The teacher, of course, wants each child to feel at home as quickly as possible with his new surroundings and new friends. At the same time, however, a teacher will choose beginning activities, projects, and visual surroundings that are richly stimulating, that will set a tone from the very first of enjoyment, excitement, and challenge.

Preparing for Reading

At Home

Undoubtedly, there is no subject as important to parents as having their children learn to read. But have you ever stopped to think just how long your child has been learning to read? It is not an activity that begins the day he enters school — he started years ago, and how ready he is for what he will learn in the first year of school depends upon what he has learned through informal ways.

He will be better prepared if his experiences at home have taught him to value books and other reading materials. He will value the art of reading if he hears parents and family discussing things they have read, shares reading time with them, has his own library and knows how to use the public one.

Also helpful is a young child's ability to concentrate for longer periods of time, to listen to the full meanings of words and sentences. Encouraging him to express himself verbally gives him a feel for words, a richer vocabulary.

The more he sees and discusses — on travels, trips to museums, galleries, or even walks through the woods or city — the more he is curious, the more he wants to express himself, the more he is ready to read.

At School

There are almost as many methods for teaching reading as there are teachers (or book publishers), and after much study of the subject educators generally conclude that a good teacher uses several methods or combinations of them to teach reading to each child in a class. Parents who come to school with a preconceived notion of how it should be done are being unfair to the teacher and to their child.

Not too long ago one could walk into a first grade room and see all the children reading from the same line of the same page of the same book. It isn't like that anymore, because teachers know that children are not all the *same*, and they have the training and the tools to make education fit the child.

Individualized teaching, which is beginning to dominate the life of the primary years in school, provides a wide choice of

books, workbooks, and teacher-made materials. The child selects resources at his level and works either by himself, with teacher direction, or in a reading group. Frequently activities in other areas — science, social studies, art — are the things that stimulate an interest in reading.

If the teacher were to explain in educational terms what the approach is in reading, each parent in a classroom might hear a different prescription — phonics, word recognition, the Initial Teaching Alphabet.

The point is that learning to read is an enormous challenge that young children will meet enthusiastically — if they believe in themselves and in the concern of the teacher for their own individual strengths and limitations.

Preparing for Learning with Others

At Home

When a child enters school, the circle that has nurtured and protected him — the family — grows bigger and bigger. Now he must cope with new authorities (teachers and principals) and with at least 20 other classmates, many of whom will be strangers and some of whom may not even be easy to form friendships with.

He can be just as secure in this larger circle if he has learned at home how to share himself with others.

Most families in urban areas have available to their children preschool experiences — public and private nurseries and kindergartens. But even if these are not available or you do not take advantage of them, your child will gain immeasurably from the experience of being in an organized group of young children. Play groups with relatives and neighbors teach young children how:

- To share their things
- To plan and carry out activities with others
- To listen
- To be patient.

If your child has learned these things *before* he comes to school, he will "fit in" with ease.

At School

Entering into the larger world of the classroom provides your child with many new opportunities for socializing, but in the beginning he may feel this is more of a threat than a comfort. Teachers, building upon the social skills learned at home, will want each child to feel secure in his new surroundings and confident in being able to work with others.

Teachers want to help each child learn:

- To give and take within a group
- To want to take part in group activities and direct them
- To handle friction when working with others
- To help others with their work and projects
- To respect the viewpoints and property of others.

These are not easy things to learn — children grow slowly out of their natural self-centeredness — but they are a necessary part of learning for children to become leaders, rather than followers, involved rather than passive members of the society they will be a part of in the future. The early years in school set the patterns for years to come.

Preparing for Self-Reliance

At Home

The other side of the coin — becoming independent — is another essential of a maturing child. Yours has swung between clinging to the security of being cared for and being told what to do all the way to the other end of the pendulum — stubborn assertion of himself, wanting to do everything his way.

He has gradually learned independence if you have allowed him to make decisions that he is capable of coping with, encouraged him to be satisfied with doing things by himself (what kind of answers do you have for that eternal complaint, "But I have nothing to do"?), taught him to take care of his things properly. Parents should be sensitive to the unique way that each child has of asking for help; otherwise, they will miss the opportunities to help him become independent.

Parents will save the time of everyone in the classroom and perhaps avoid embarassment for their children if they prepare them to be self-reliant at school. You should educate yourself in order to help your child — visit the school beforehand (most invite incoming children to observe or visit the school in the spring before the beginning of their school year). Find out about the basic routines and procedures. Such an insignificant thing as not knowing what to do with lunch money can shake the confidence of any eager child. Many teachers try to meet parents and children before school opens — don't be hesitant to find out about the simple things as well as the broader programs that may interest you more.

Little things are very important to little children trying to grow bigger.

At School

Teaching a child to be an independent thinker is the ultimate goal of education.

But it begins with very simple things in the first years of school. Your child will gradually learn how to take on the responsibility of doing things on his own and eventually initiating them. He will want to follow through and complete his work. He will become adept at problem solving and decision making that draw upon his own ideas and knowledge.

To do these things, however, a child must be able to feel secure with his independence.

When he comes to school he should be able to identify himself — know his full name, address, phone number, and the names of his parents and their occupations. He should not be afraid to ask questions, nor should he stubbornly refuse to accept direction.

In order to feel secure and open in school, your child needs a positive idea about his teachers, his classmates, his school. Don't describe them as threats to his enjoyment ("If you don't do this right, your teacher will be mad"). Negative attitudes from parents will make children more dependent upon the world they are coming from — the home — and less upon themselves.

Caring for Self

At Home

A child learns respect for his physical self primarily at home. It is the standards — and the good health habits that they foster — set by his family which are so important to helping him care for himself away from home.

Regular physical and dental checkups assure parents and children that they are in good health. Local schools will inform parents of the necessary immunizations and medical records for beginning students.

Young children need at least 12 hours of sleep each night, and plenty of time before school for a nutritious breakfast and dressing properly. Your child should know basic habits of cleanliness, such as flushing the toilet and washing his hands.

Teach your child the proper kind of behavior for riding the school bus — that the safety of all those on the bus is the overriding concern. If he walks to school, teach him safety rules about crossing streets and walk with him a few times to select the safest route, even if it may be longer.

He should wear clothing suitable for the weather which is easy to take off and on (outer wear should be marked with the child's name).

At School

A warm, friendly, understanding teacher will help your child feel "at home" when he comes to school for the first time. But teachers are not substitute mothers. They will expect children to take care of their simple, basic needs — or else they will have to spend precious school time on habits that should have been formed at home.

At school your child should be able to take off and put on his own coats, boots, gloves (that's why it is important that zippers and buttons should be reachable and workable). He should always put them up in the place provided.

He should be able to go to the bathroom by himself and understand that he must ask permission so that not too many children will be out of the classroom at one time. Good cleanliness habits are particularly important where many children are using the same facilities.

Children who are suspected of being ill should not be sent to school. A coughing or sneezing child is a threat to everyone else in the classroom. Doctors generally recommend that children who have been running a fever should stay home at least one day after the temperature returns to normal. If both parents work, arrangements should be made before the child enters school for emergency care. Young children should not be required to act as if they are well when they aren't — just because parents have not prepared for emergencies.

Sharing the Learning

At Home

Strangers don't have much to say to each other. If you don't know your school and its teachers, and they don't know you and the attitudes you have about your child's learning, neither one of you will be able to help your child learn.

This isn't an invitation to be a "pressure parent" — one with preconceived ideas about what the school can do for your child who tries to impose these ideas upon child and teacher alike. Teachers find this kind of communicating a frustrating experience which they will try to avoid.

There are, however, many satisfying ways in which parents and teachers can work together.

As a parent you should make personal contact with your child's teacher, not just the school. You should use all opportunities to observe in classrooms (at the invitation of the teachers); you should show interest in what your child is learning and learn about his attitudes, his concerns, and school experiences. You should know enough about the school program to form intelligent opinions that cannot be influenced by uninformed opinions.

Your openness and concern about the school will encourage teachers to communicate with you — to discuss ideas, call upon you for extracurricular help, be frank with you if there are problems.

The channels are many — PTA organizations, community advisory groups, the work of room mothers and classroom committees, regular parent-teacher conferences, and consistent interest in what your child is doing. How much parents share in their child's learning depends upon their initiative.

At School

Earlier we discussed "open classrooms" and how these were tailoring education to the individual needs of children.

In a sense, parents may now participate in "open schools," with their part of the learning process dependent upon their time, talents, and interests.

In early childhood education, particularly, parents are being brought into the classrooms as teacher aides and volunteers where they have a direct relationship with children in the learning process.

But even if you do not participate this way, teachers welcome parents who have special interests they can share with the children, who can contribute small amounts of time — e.g., field trips, mounting art exhibits — or whose professional background can help a teacher enrich the curriculum.

In some schools parents and teachers are working together to plan the educational program for a child — the parent learns what is required of his child and learns how to help him at home. In others, there are advisory groups, where principals, parents, teachers, and students work together.

Preparing for the Future

At Home

Almost everything we have said so far was to help parents and child prepare for the future. It involves a delicate balance of learning basic skills and attitudes with being prepared for the unknown, in social relationships as well as academic achievements.

No one can accurately predict what family life will be like in the future. No matter how much our environment changes, however, the basic needs of children for affection, understanding, encouragement — the things that lead them to their own selfhood — will not change. And so, neither will the influence of the home, and its importance not only as a child enters school but throughout his school years.

At School

Schools are in the business of change because they are constantly seeking better ways to educate young people.

Change can take many forms, such as the use of space and organizational patterns which we have discussed. It may show in the use of resources — updating curriculum, using technology to create individual learning programs. It will show in the deepening professional knowledge of teachers about how children learn.

And although these innovations may vary from teacher to teacher and school to school, there is one indisputable trend in education — the increasing role of parents as constructive partners in the never-ending process of learning.

How To Foster Creativity

- From the time he is an infant select the toys and other manipulative resources that are *appropriate for his level.*
- Provide as many resources in the home as possible — art work (scrap materials are as much fun for a child as expensive paints); books (there are many series of inexpensive paperbacks for the child old enough to be interested in books); simple musical instruments.
- Use all of your local resources to stimulate your child's curiosity — the zoo, the library, nature walks, museums, galleries, puppet shows.
- Encourage your child to express himself about all that he sees, hears. Ask him to tell you stories, compose poems that you can write for him.
- Teach him to sort and classify things; e.g., by color, number, or other common characteristics.

It is very important that every activity you plan for your child includes *you*. When you give him an art project, sit down and do it with him for a while, at least. Sing and play musical instruments with him. Don't just hand him a ball; show him how to hold it and throw it. It is fine for parents to want to give their children all the possible advantages, but the children will get more out of these advantages if they share them with parents.

Reading Readiness in the Home

- Needless to say, the example of parents sets the attitudes about reading in children. If you read a lot, your child will want to. If you have books and magazines and newspapers, your child will want his own collection. If you use the local library, so will he.
- Help your child be sensitive to sounds. Always speak clearly and in complete sentences.
- Stimulate his attention span in reading. For example, choose adventure stories with quick or surprise endings, but stop before you've finished and ask him to make up his own ending to the story.
- Provide a quiet place for reading. If he does not have a room of his own, he should have at least a corner that is his — for his books and other belongings.
- Establish a quiet time. There should be some time set aside each day from the time he is an infant for quiet reading, preferably just before bedtime.
- Provide a balance in stimulating entertainment. Parents would be wise to limit both the quantity and quality of the TV programs their children watch. If they become too accustomed to being a passive viewer, they will miss many of the exciting challenges of childhood. Many TV programs provide a takeoff point for parents to interest their children in books, science, fantasy — but parent participation again is the key. Children whose parents watch such programs as *Sesame Street* with them come to school better prepared than those who watch by themselves.

Fostering Self-Reliance

- Help your child learn to take care of his things promptly and correctly, and be willing to do so.
- Give him responsibilities around the home that genuinely make him feel a part of the family, such as regular care of pets, help in the kitchen, appropriate errands.
- Let him participate in things that are important to him, too, such as ideas for decorating his room, selection of clothes — given with positive guidance that he appreciates rather than rejects.
- Give him practice in handling small change, purchasing items at the store, for example.

Parent's Word List

Achievement Test — Usually given at the same time each year to measure the *progress* of students in basic subjects.

British Infant School — A system of organization and teaching in Great Britain in which younger children, usually ages 5 through 7, are grouped together. Teaching is individualized and built around a child's interests. Open or ungraded schools in the United States received much of their inspiration from the infant schools.

Cognitive Development — An approach to learning in which a child matures by building upon experiences. Each stage of learning depends upon the previous stage and the readiness of the child to go further.

Cumulative File — A central file maintained by many schools which contains the academic, health, and other records of each student year by year.

Diagnostic-Prescriptive Teaching A part of an individualized school program in which teachers and other school personnel determine the educational needs of each child (through tests, observation, etc.) and prescribe an individual program for the child.

Electric Company — A series of TV programs, patterned after *Sesame Street,* which is directed at an audience of first through third graders.

Follow-Through — A federally financed program which extends the benefits of preschool (Head Start) special programs for disadvantaged children into the first years of regular school, usually up to the third grade.

Head Start — A federal program for preschool children, ages 3 through 6, who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Small classes, individual attention, medical and counseling services, and stimulating play and learning resources are directed at helping the children prepare for the first grade.

IQ Test — IQ stands for "intelligence quotient." An IQ test measures a person's ability to think at the time of the test, but it is generally believed that intelligence is not fixed and the test scores may change with maturity.

ITA — These initials stand for Initial Teaching Alphabet. This is a method of teaching reading in the early grades which uses a 42-character alphabet to represent each sound in the English language, instead of the 26 characters of standard English. Transition to the standard alphabet is made after a child has acquired skill and self-confidence in reading.

Learning Center — An arrangement usually found in open classrooms where certain parts of the room are set aside for specific subject interests, such as reading, math, and science.

Nongraded or Ungraded School — As compared to a traditional school, where children are grouped together according to age and progress one year at a time, the ungraded school groups children according to ability, usually by subject rather than general ability. Instead of being a third-grader, an eight-year-old child might be working with children older than he in reading, and younger than he in math, if those are his ability levels.

Open School — Uses the cross-age grouping concept of the ungraded school, but adds other elements to make learning as "open" as possible for children. Children are partners in determining how and what they will learn, and their special interests frequently are the motivation for learning, even in the basic skills. The open classroom or school uses team teaching, learning centers, and individualized instruction.

Media Center — A term frequently used to describe the "new" library. Resources include not only books and magazines, but films, filmstrips, tapes, and records as well. Many provide individual carrels for private study; some have closed circuit TV where a student can draw upon a central data bank for programs and films to meet his special needs.

Programmed Instruction — A method for individualized instruction that allows a student to work at his own rate of ability through the use of workbooks, special materials, or technological equipment. A student works with the materials on his own. He must complete a unit correctly before going on to another one.

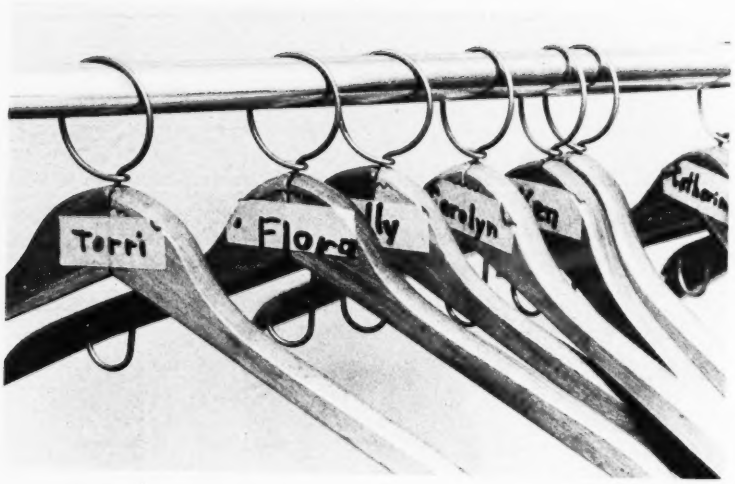
Schools Without Failure — A school-wide approach to learning in which a child's abilities and efforts count more than a numerical grade. A term generally applied to schools that are oriented around individual instruction.

Sesame Street — A highly successful TV program for preschool children, which uses entertainment to stimulate learning. Its aim is to prepare children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, for first grade.

SRA Reading Materials — Widely used by the schools, these are color coded programmed reading materials. Children progress from one color set to another, as their reading skills improve. SRA stand for Science Research Associates, publisher of the materials.

Words in Color — Another basic learning-to-read program, which emphasizes whole word identification through the use of color.

Team Teaching — A technique usually found in ungraded schools and open schools, where teachers work together as a team, rather than in the traditional one teacher, one classroom arrangement. Team teaching takes advantage of the individual abilities and interests of each teacher (one may specialize in reading, another in math). A teaching team may also include student teachers, aides, and volunteer workers.


Terri
Flora

Resources for Parents

Your school is one of the best resources for parents. Classroom teachers, of course, are the first and most important source for information and advice. School principals are there to help parents as well as teachers. Special resource persons within the school, such as counselors and librarians, also serve the parent community as well as students.

Your local PTA or other parent organization is the best contact for finding out about how parents can communicate with schools and learn more about them. PTA groups have available to them a wealth of material prepared for parents about education.

Other organizations which publish resources available to parents include:

Association for Childhood Education International, 3615 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20016. (has many low-priced pamphlets about children, arts and crafts for them, helping them to learn).

Child Study Association of America, Inc., 9 E. 89th St., New York, N.Y. 10028. Books and pamphlets to help parents of children from birth through adolescence.

U.S. Government Printing Office, Division of Public Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402. Its ever-changing list of publications includes many on child care.

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